

■ Encore

'Guardian Angel'

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As scout platoon observers/controllers at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Chaffee, Ark., we have seen platoons go through an entire rotation without being resupplied, establishing reliable communications or knowing what the rest of their battalions are doing.

One reason for this is that there is no one person at the Tactical Operations Center who is completely dedicated to the scouts. There are plenty of people who have a partial interest in scouts, but it is easy for any of them to be preoccupied with other concerns. Our solution to this problem is to have a scout "guardian angel" at the TOC. We've considered several candidates and we think the best man for the job is the scout platoon sergeant.

In reality, scout platoons are almost always separated from the rest of their battalion by either time or distance. While this separation is essential to the scouts' ability to collect information for the battalion, it represents problems that manifest themselves in the form of communications, resupply and knowing the status of friendly forces.

Having a guardian angel is one solution to improving the scout platoon's ability to conduct sustained operations. His duties would include:

- Generating, coordinating and possibly conducting resupply operations.
- Coordinating with the battalion staff for recon and surveillance plans, fire support, link-up operations, passage of lines, transportation and air mission briefings.
- Being a dedicated receiving station to enhance two-way communications between the platoon and the TOC.
- Providing information to the battalion staff during course of action development and wargaming sessions.
- Initiating operation and fragmentary orders for the platoon leader when the mission is changed.



Editor's note: Encore is a new feature designed to allow readers to address topics from previous issues of the Journal. This first Encore feature relates to the winter issue's combat theme. Articles that significantly contribute to further discussion of earlier topics will be considered for this feature. They should be between four and seven double-spaced, typed pages. More succinct observations about previous topics should be addressed in shorter letters to the editor.

Proposed platoon sergeant role would benefit battalion's scouts

The platoon sergeant is the best man for this job because he is completely responsive to the scout platoon; he has a vested interest in its health, welfare and success; he understands its capabilities and limitations; he has the rank and experience to "make things happen" and he can effectively communicate with staff members and write operations orders.

We've considered other players in this role, such as the assistant S-3, battlefield information coordinator, the CSM and a member of the scout platoon who is on profile. We assume, based on our observations, that neither the assistant S-3 nor the CSM have scout platoon experience.

The only apparent drawback to using the platoon sergeant in this role is that his being at the TOC denies the platoon a valuable asset in the field. However, closer analysis shows that most scout platoon sergeants are co-located with the scout platoon leader at the Command Post, often finding themselves in the role of a shadow platoon leader instead of performing traditional NCO functions. If the CP is attacked, both the platoon leader and platoon sergeant become casualty risks. Having the platoon sergeant at the TOC, however, would allow him to assume leadership of the platoon in the event that the platoon leader is a casualty or if communications are severed.

Let's now examine a typical JRTC scenario and see how the scout platoon sergeant, if located at the TOC in his guardian angel role, could alleviate the problems generally faced by scout platoons.

The battalion is conducting a search and attack operation while the scout platoon is conducting a zone recon to try to find the enemy. During the operation, both the scouts and rifle companies are moving a lot. From the TOC, the scout platoon sergeant can keep the units informed of the scouts' locations. This helps prevent fratricide. For example, if Co. A calls for fire on a suspected enemy element, the scout platoon sergeant quickly checks the target against the locations of his scouts. If the scouts have been mistaken for the

enemy or they are too close for comfort to the target, the platoon sergeant advises the Fire Support Officer. While the FSO is supposed to know the locations of friendly forces, the numerous scout "killings" at the JRTC justifies a redundant confirmation. Likewise, the platoon sergeant can keep the scouts informed about locations of other friendly forces. If the scouts have a need to re-enter friendly lines for any reason, they will be able to identify who is in a position to fix or finish any enemy they find.

Because of the distance at which scouts operate in front of the rest of the battalion, communications is often a problem. If the scout platoon sergeant doesn't regularly hear his scouts on a radio, he can call from the TOC to check on them. If this is unsuccessful, he can follow the platoon's SOP by trying other frequencies, transmitting on unsecure channels, using AM frequencies, etc. If all else fails, he can get the commo officer involved. Too often, scouts gather excellent information that goes unreported because of communications problems. It is easy for the TOC to forget about the scouts, and the guardian angel can circumvent this oversight.

After a couple of days into operations, the scouts will need to be resupplied. This is difficult since scouts don't have the same support structure as do rifle platoons. Again, the platoon sergeant guardian angel can compensate for this. He knows the scouts' scheme of maneuver, how many days of supplies they are carrying and what logpacs are needed. As the platoon moves to its objective rally points during zone recon, the platoon sergeant can ensure that supplies meet up with the scouts. The many scout platoons that have gone an entire JRTC rotation without being resupplied will attest to the value of having a guardian angel fill this role.

While scouts gather information during zone recon, the S-2 pieces together a picture of the enemy situation. He might feel certain enough about enemy locations that he believes an attack is warranted. The scouts will probably be tasked to

conduct an area recon. Unfortunately, the battalion staff usually plans this mission without the knowledge of and without input from the scouts. In the most extreme case we've seen, the battalion attacked an objective one kilometer from the scout platoon's objective rally point, without either group realizing the other's situation. If a guardian angel had been in the TOC, he could have advised the S-3 about the scouts' position and role, sent a warning order and conducted face-to-face coordination with key players, such as the FSO, based on instructions from the platoon leader. Ideally, the platoon sergeant could have personally delivered a fragmentary order to the platoon as part of a resupply mission.

To continue with the misadventures of the same platoon, the platoon CP was misidentified and attacked by a friendly Cobra helicopter. The platoon sergeant was "killed." Had he been in the TOC, he could have advised the Cobra of the scouts' location before the engagement. This would also have avoided the chance of both the platoon leader and platoon sergeant being killed. Had the platoon leader been killed anyway, the platoon sergeant could move forward and assume command of the scouts.

While having the platoon sergeant at the TOC has significant advantages, it does have a cost. The platoon leader loses his easy access to the more experienced platoon sergeant during field operations.

Units will have to conduct customized Mission, Equipment, Terrain, Troops-Time analysis to determine if the guardian angel concept will work for them. Based on our observations of at least one scout platoon from every light infantry division in the Army, all of which had similar problems, we think that the guardian angel concept is a viable option and that the scout platoon sergeant is the best man for the job.

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